

# THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES IN THE REAL WORLD

by

**Rebecca Lee Wallace**

Bachelor of Arts in History and Chinese; Bachelor of Philosophy in International and Area  
Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2016

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2016

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This thesis was presented

by

Rebecca Wallace

It was defended on

April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016

and approved by

Katja Wezel, DAAD Visiting Assistant Professor, History

Kun Qian, Assistant Professor, East Asian Languages and Literatures

Arif Dirlik, Green Professor at the University of British Columbia

Thesis Director: David Luesink, Visiting Assistant Professor, History

Copyright © Rebecca Wallace

2016

# **THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES IN THE REAL WORLD**

Rebecca Wallace

University of Pittsburgh, 2016

Since their foundation in 2004, hundreds of Confucius Institutes have been established across the globe. Confucius Institutes, Sponsored by the Office of Chinese Language Council International or Hanban, are non-profit organizations whose stated goal is to act as ambassadors for Chinese language and culture. Most recently, Confucius Institutes have attracted controversy because of their presentation of Chinese history and identity. This project explores how the Confucius Institutes materials and central message are problematic; specifically how the message they promote bolsters China's territorial claims. Recognizing, however, that the Confucius Institutes are realistically unlikely to leave anytime soon, this project explores the salient differences between Confucius Institutes that mitigate the problematic nature of the Confucius Institute's materials and those that remain sources of tension.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.0 IDENTITY PRESENTATION AND NATIONALISM .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3.0 CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES IN THE REAL WORLD.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>4.0 CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>60</b>

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

When the Office of Chinese Language Council International, or Hanban founded the Confucius Institutes in 2004 and the Confucius Classrooms in 2006, their mission was to promote Chinese language learning and Chinese culture abroad. In just over eleven years the Confucius Institutes have grown rapidly and spread worldwide. There are now over fifteen hundred Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms. Almost half of these Institutes and Classrooms (701) are located within universities in the United States.<sup>1</sup> In the twelve years since their inception the Confucius Institutes have taught thousands of people Chinese and frequently been the source of considerable controversy.

With this rapid expansion has come criticism. One of the most prominent critics is Marshall Sahlins, a professor at the University of Chicago, published an article in *The Nation* in October of 2014 that offered a sharp critique of Confucius Institutes and their place within universities, particularly American universities. His comments sparked a lively debate about the place of Confucius Institutes in universities, their effect on free speech, and whether or not they are a dangerous assertion of Chinese soft power. In 2014, Sahlins was one of several faculty members who signed a petition calling for an end to the University of Chicago's contract with the Confucius Institutes. Sahlins argued that the Confucius Institutes were limiting academic freedom as, "Hanban is an instrument of the party state operating as an international pedagogical

---

<sup>1</sup> Confucius Institute Online, accessed 3-1-2015, [http://www.chinesecio.com/m/cio\\_wci](http://www.chinesecio.com/m/cio_wci)

organization.”<sup>2</sup> In particular, Sahlins argues that Confucius Institutes largely ignore controversial issues, especially those related to ethnic nationalism such as the independence of Tibet or Xinjiang, or the political status of Taiwan.<sup>3</sup>

Later that year, the director of Hanban, Xu Lin, gave an interview where she stated that she had made a phone call to the Beijing representatives of the University of Chicago with one sentence, “if your school decides to stop the program I will agree,” and asserted that her attitude “made the University of Chicago officials nervous” (让对方真了急 Ràng duìfāng zhēnle jí) and that therefore they quickly agreed to keep the Confucius Institute.<sup>4</sup> Yet after the comments by Xu Lin were published, the University of Chicago issued a statement suspending its contract negotiations with the Confucius Institutes, stating that, “recently published comments about UChicago in an article about the director-general of Hanban are incompatible with a continued equal partnership.”<sup>5</sup> Whether or not the University of Chicago’s representatives were initially willing to keep the Confucius Institute is unclear, but the specific citation of Xu Lin in the University of Chicago’s decision to withdraw from the program indicates that the university felt that commenting on their actions crossed a line.

After the University of Chicago’s decision, opponents and proponents of the Confucius Institutes took to the Internet to voice their opinions about many aspects of the Confucius Institutes and shared a range of opinions about the structure of the Confucius Institutes, whether the Confucius Institutes were interfering with free speech, and the place of outside organizations

---

<sup>2</sup> Sahlins, Marshall, “China U.” *The Nation*, Oct 29, 2013, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> “Wenhua de kunjing, zaiyu buzhibujue 文化的困境,在于不知不觉” *JieFang Weekend*, Sep 19, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> University of Chicago, “Statement on the Confucius Institute at the University of Chicago,” September 25, 2014.

in higher education. Many of those weighing in, however, have used a variety of different anecdotal assertions about different local Confucius Institutes rather than on the common policies of Hanban or the way that Hanban presents Chinese identity in the materials they produce centrally. Much current scholarship on the Confucius Institutes has also sought to discuss the Confucius Institutes in terms of their context within universities or as promoters of soft power, but does not look at the particular message Hanban is sending through the Confucius Institutes.

This project seeks a more holistic understanding of the Confucius Institutes by analyzing how they operate on three levels: first by examining the centralized messages Hanban is sending through its promotional and cultural materials; next by looking at local structure and differences among Confucius Institutes; and finally by placing the Confucius Institutes in a global context of changes in international education. Each level of this analysis is crucial to understanding if the Confucius Institutes are “academic malware”<sup>6</sup> as asserted by Sahlins, valuable tools for cultural learning, or something in between.

When all three of these aspects are taken into account it becomes clear that the cultural materials of the Confucius Institute promote a view of history that is heavily influenced by ethnic nationalism and designed to bolster Chinese territorial claims. That being said, an analysis of the structure of local Confucius Institutes demonstrates that that message is not being received or promoted equally amongst Confucius Institutes, and clearly expresses the need for firm action by the local (non-Chinese) teachers and administrators at the Confucius Institutes to maintain academic independence and integrity. Finally, the Confucius Institute’s relationship to larger

---

<sup>6</sup> Sahlins, Marshall, “Confucius Institutes: Academic Malware,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 12.46 (2014).



trends of privatization in global education demonstrates the need for universities to commit to independently supporting and financing international education and specifically education about China that balances the influence of the Confucius Institutes. An analysis of recent trends indicates that the tension created by the Confucius Institutes is significantly increased due to increasing reliance on external funding.

These aspects indicate that while the Confucius Institutes are problematic, if local administrators insist on maintaining academic freedom and universities commit to supporting multiple perspectives and scholarship on China, then the benefits of the Confucius Institutes outweigh the problematic nature of some of their curriculum materials. It is clear that these requirements are not always followed, but it is also clear that an outright elimination of the Confucius Institutes would harm tens of thousands of language learners, many who have no other avenues to Chinese language learning that Confucius Institutes provide. The Confucius Institutes are successful because they meet a demand that universities and American universities in particular are unwilling or unable to fill for international education, and as such it is unlikely that they will cease activities in the U.S. anytime soon. As such this analysis seeks to understand the salient differences between Confucius Institutes that have garnered controversy and those that seem to have essentially mitigated the effect of the problematic materials and message that Hanban is promoting, and demonstrates the possibility for a middle ground between the outright elimination of the Confucius Institutes and their unfettered continuation.

## 2.0 IDENTITY PRESENTATION AND NATIONALISM

The way that the Confucius Institutes present themselves both on their website, and in the cultural materials designed and promoted by Hanban make assertions about who is Chinese, what Chinese national identity is, and when Chinese national identity was formed. Looking at the cultural materials produced by Hanban is also important because unlike the educational materials that are designed for Chinese consumption domestically, these materials are specifically designed for a foreign audience. Analyzing these materials gives us insight into the goals of Hanban and the Confucius Institutes, particularly because the act of presenting identity, especially the type of identity aimed at a particular audience is an act that reinforces and shapes identity.<sup>7</sup> In other words, as the Confucius Institutes show what their perception of Chinese identity is to the world, they inherently also shape and consolidate that identity. Using the cultural materials produced centrally by Hanban is useful to see if the Confucius Institutes are closer to the assertions opponents make or closer to those the proponents make.

Both the Confucius Institute magazine and the Confucius Institute Annual Reports are useful because they demonstrate what Hanban finds most important and noteworthy about the Confucius Institutes. The *Common Knowledge About China* series, the *Roads to the World* series, a beginner teaching textbook (*Learn Chinese with Me*), and an advanced teaching

---

<sup>7</sup> Stryker, Sheldon and Burke, Peter, “The Past, Present and Future of an Identity Theory,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63.4: 2000, 289.

textbook (*Contemporary Chinese*). Both book series were explicitly mentioned in these documents as significant achievements of the Confucius Institutes, and are useful as they make more concrete and expanded assertions from the Culture Discovery section of the Confucius Institute website. Additionally, it is clear that the Annual Reports are produced at a very high level in the Confucius Institute hierarchy as each of them include an introduction by Xu Lin herself. I analyzed the teaching textbooks to see how Hanban recommended teaching in the classroom and whether it was consistent with the other cultural material. I found that the textbooks were consistent, although it should be noted that these textbooks offer recommendations for classroom learning that are not uniformly applied in all Confucius Institutes.

Most of the Confucius Institute website is dedicated to redirecting visitors to local Confucius Institutes, disseminating information about the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK), and a link to a database for teachers with various small news articles and recommendations for textbooks. The Culture Discovery section is useful because it is the only part of the main Confucius Institute website that discusses culture in depth and is the first place a visitor has access to cultural material. These articles are the most public face of what Hanban asserts about Chinese identity and culture. This section contains 529 articles looking at ten general topics: Food, Travel, Folk Custom[s], Chinese Kung Fu, Drama and Opera, Tea and Wine, TCM, Literature and Arts, People, and Cultural Heritage.

It is important to note that these materials are not the entirety of the prolific works produced by Hanban, and that the Confucius Institute materials are only one facet of the organization. They cannot, for example, capture the impact of which projects are given independent funding, which teachers teach at the different institutes and their individual impact,

or what speakers or cultural events are hosted by the institutes. While these articles cannot demonstrate the entirety of the Confucius Institute's impact, there are several trends that emerge from these articles that are important to analyze because they are different from much of the rhetoric surrounding the benefits or drawbacks of the Confucius Institutes.

Proponents of the Confucius Institutes often argue that the Confucius Institutes remain largely apolitical, and that the Confucius Institutes welcome debates about controversial topics in a way that might not be possible within China itself. Opponents of the Confucius Institutes, however, argue that the Confucius Institutes promote views about China that follow the party line. This debate, which has largely occurred online on academic blogs, has been largely backed up by anecdotal information to support both sides: for example Stephen Hanson argued that the Confucius Institute at William and Mary had no issue with an invitation being extended to the Dalai Lama to speak at their campus,<sup>8</sup> while Matteo Mecacci cites that North Carolina State pulled an invitation to the Dalai Lama after pushback from their Confucius Institute.<sup>9</sup> While these debates will be discussed in greater detail later, what this anecdotal information does not discuss is what assertions the cultural materials of the Confucius Institutes are making about Chinese identity, and whether or not the cultural materials themselves are apolitical. Analyzing the Confucius Institute website's cultural materials, the Confucius Institute's magazine, two series of supplemental cultural books, and the governing laws of Hanban offers a broader perspective on what Hanban is trying to achieve, rather than focusing on any one Confucius Institute.

---

<sup>8</sup> Steven Hanson, Tuesday, July 1, 2014 (4:52 PM), comment on "The Debate Over Confucius Institutes PART II," *China File*, July 1, 2014 <http://www.chinafile.com/conversation/debate-over-confucius-institutes-part-ii>

<sup>9</sup> Matteo Mecacci, Tuesday, June 24, 2014 (11:23 PM), comment on "The Debate Over Confucius Institutes

Additionally, an examination of the Confucius Institute materials that are centrally produced by Hanban is significant because it explores one of the main points of contention in the debate over the Confucius Institutes: whether the Confucius Institutes can be thought of as machines of propaganda. In particular, it references the debate over Politburo member Li Changchun's oft-quoted statement, that the Confucius Institutes are "an important part of China's overseas propaganda set-up."<sup>10</sup> For obvious reasons, opponents of the Confucius Institutes find this statement problematic, and an indication of China's true motives in forming the Confucius Institutes. Others, such as Edward McCord, argue that, "the Chinese term translated as "propaganda" (*xuanchuan*)... has no negative connotation."<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that while there is little doubt Li Changchun said this phrase as it has been cited by plenty of credible sources, I have been unable to find the original source. Regardless of the context, looking at the centrally distributed materials for the Confucius Institutes allows us to see what messages the Confucius Institute leadership is disseminating. An analysis of the trends in these documents demonstrates that they do resemble propaganda materials, and have a targeted and specific message aimed at bolstering China's territorial claims.

First, the cultural materials present Chinese national identity as largely primordial. A primordialist believes that nations are old, natural entities, and that each person is "born into a nation in the same way s/he is born into a family."<sup>12</sup> The Confucius Institute materials<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Sahlins, "China U."

<sup>11</sup> McCord, Edward, "Confucius Institutes: Hardly a Threat to Academic Freedoms," *The Diplomat*, accessed 4-25-16, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/confucius-institutes-hardly-a-threat-to-academic-freedoms/>.

<sup>12</sup> Özkirimli, Umut, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (New York: St Martin's, 2000), 66.

<sup>13</sup> The phrase "Confucius Institute materials" refers to those materials mentioned above that I reviewed.

consistently present China as having existed in a culturally contiguous manner for thousands of years. For example, beginning textbooks mention that, “modern Chinese people call themselves the descendants of dragons.”<sup>14</sup> While this claim obviously is not literal, it also asserts that “modern Chinese people” have a clear and distinct identity that extends back to antiquity and thus makes no distinction between Chinese people today and those who lived in the region thousands of years ago.

The manner in which the cultural materials present the Xia dynasty and the Yellow Emperor, particularly *Common Knowledge About Chinese History* and the Confucius Institute website, reinforce a primordialist view. The Yellow Emperor is supposed to have established the Chinese people and to have been a member of the Xia dynasty, but in reality he is a legendary figure. While the Yellow Emperor is famous within China, the historical record to prove his actual existence and the existence of the Xia dynasty itself is cursory at best. The Confucius Institutes present him as a significant historical figure. According to the article, the Yellow Emperor is “the earliest ancestor of Chinese civilization and the tribe leader of China in remote antiquity.”<sup>15</sup> He is presented in the same manner as other figures that have been historically proven and nowhere in his description does the article mention that he is largely legendary.

The article also asserts that he is responsible for “unifying all Chinese ethnic groups.” This is significant because instead of describing him as unifying the ethnic groups living in China, the article makes an assertion that those people can be considered “Chinese,” which implies not only that Chinese history extends back to the Xia dynasty and the Yellow Emperor but also that there was a Chinese national identity present at the time. In *Common Knowledge*

---

<sup>14</sup> Wu, Zhongwei, *Contemporary Chinese Textbook* (Beijing: Sinolingua, 2008), 108.

<sup>15</sup> “Huangdi (Yellow Emperor),” Confucius Institute Online, accessed 3-1-16, <http://www.chinesecio.com/cms/en/culture/huangdi-yellow-emperor-huang-di>

*About Chinese History*, the Xia dynasty is again presented as historical fact. The book specifically lists the succession of different rulers and even gives a specific date (2070 BC) as the beginning of the Xia dynasty.<sup>16</sup>

The idea of Chinese national history as a continuous entity stretching back thousands of years is not a new one, but is certainly a contentious one. Several scholars, such as Sigrid Schmalzer,<sup>17</sup> have pointed out that the desire to extend Chinese history as far back as possible bolsters the idea of Chinese ethnic identity arising in the distant past. In the late 1990s the Chinese government sponsored the Xia-Shang-Zhou project in an attempt to find evidence of the earliest dynasties in China and to push back history. At the conclusion of the project, the government proudly announced that it had succeeded in demonstrating the existence of the Xia dynasty and successfully pushed demonstrable history back 1,229 years.<sup>18</sup> Many scholars, particularly western ones, however, rejected this number.<sup>19</sup> Jiang Xiaoyuan, a scholar on the project protested that his concluded date had been ignored in favor of the earlier dates published in the study.<sup>20</sup> They argued that while there was evidence for the existence of cultures at that time, it was a leap to presume that those cultures were the Xia dynasty, and a greater leap to establish those peoples as having a shared culture with the civilizations that succeeded them.

By presenting the Yellow Emperor as a concrete historical figure and as the unifier of a preexisting Chinese people, however, the Confucius Institutes go a step further than even the

---

<sup>16</sup> Liu Zepeng, *Common Knowledge About Chinese History*, (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Schmalzer, Sigrid, *The People's Peking Man: Popular Science and Human Identity in Twentieth Century China*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Erik Eckholm, "In China, Ancient History Kindles Modern Doubts," *New York Times*, Nov 10, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Nivison, David. "The Xia-Shang-Zhou Project: Two Approaches to Dating," *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 4 (2002).

<sup>20</sup> Eckholm, "Ancient History."

state-sponsored Xia-Shang-Zhou project in order to present a primordial national identity. This is significant because many of the other theories surrounding Chinese nationalism that have been promoted in China and abroad lie much closer to a perennial perspective. Perennialism argues that modern nations are merely the newest manifestation of very old concepts and that “the ‘essence’ that differentiates any particular nation from others manages to remain intact despite all vicissitudes of history.”<sup>21</sup> Thus primordialism asserts that ethnicity and nationality is inherent and unchanging, while perennialism argues that nationality and ethnicity are ancient but that they have presented in different ways over the course of history.

It is important to note that these terms, while significant in a debate about nationalism, are rarely those used by ordinary people when describing the inhabitants of different countries in the past. It is also not unusual to casually use the word China when talking about the people who lived in what is now China thousands of years ago. We also describe the civilizations that built the pyramids as “ancient Egyptians” even though there is a significant difference between societies under the pharaohs and the modern nation-state of Egypt. An assertion that the Yellow Emperor is the ancestor of Chinese civilization does not alone necessarily preclude recognition of differences between current and past societies. In this respect, what this analysis of the Confucius Institute explores is what George Orwell would describe as nationalism rather than patriotism. Orwell describes patriotism as “devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life” without political assertions, but nationalism as “inseparable from the desire for power.”<sup>22</sup> However, the language used to describe ancient historical figures along with the ambiguity surrounding transitions in power and the adoption of outside invasions as “Chinese” history does

---

<sup>21</sup> Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 70.

<sup>22</sup> Orwell, George, “Notes on Nationalism,” *Orwell*, [http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e\\_nat](http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e_nat).



indicate that the Confucius Institutes present Chinese national identity in a far more primordialist manner, one that aligns more closely with Orwell's definition of nationalism than patriotism.

Analyzing Chinese nationalism is particularly challenging precisely because Chinese history stretches back for thousands of years. Suisheng Zhao in his work, *A Nation-State by Construction*, attempts to view Chinese nationalism in its historical context, and describes contemporary Chinese nationalism as tempered "primordialism with a careful measure of instrumentalism."<sup>23</sup> As Zhao presents it, instrumentalism is the intentional creation of ethnic and national identity with a particular political aim in mind.<sup>24</sup> In other words, Zhao argues that the Chinese government presents China's national history as ancient and enduring, but also uses that presentation for political gain.

Zhao admits that nationalism in China can only really be thought to emerge with the Late Imperial period, and that although China has an extremely long imperial history, China was "not a nation-state before the nineteenth century."<sup>25</sup> He goes on, however, to argue that prior to the emergence of nationalism in China there was a presence of what he calls culturalism that allowed subjects of the Chinese emperor to relate to one other. Under this system anyone who accepted Chinese cultural practice "could be incorporated within its culturalist bounds."<sup>26</sup>

Zhao argues that this ancient culturalism was defined by the presence of accepted values that were unique to those living within China. Under this argument, people living in the region we now call China "perceived their country as the only civilization in the universal world

---

<sup>23</sup> Zhao, Suisheng, *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press) 7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction*, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

(tianxia), one that embodied a universal set of values.”<sup>27</sup> Under this model, belonging to a group was based not on any perception of ethnicity or territory, but rather on similar cultural qualities. Therefore, if non-Han ethnic groups demonstrated the same “universal set of values,” they would also be included in the “universal world.”<sup>28</sup> Zhao’s argument mirrors that of Benedict Anderson, who proposed that prior to the advent of the nation people related to each other in terms of “dynastic realms” in which the people living under a certain king or emperor could recognize each other as fellow subjects but not fellow citizens.<sup>29</sup> Zhao aligns far more closely with a modernist theory of nationalism, which sees the nation as a relatively new concept. This clearly conflicts with the presentation of China as an ancient nation in the Confucius Institute cultural materials.

In addition to contradicting scholarly arguments like those of Zhao, the cultural materials of the Confucius Institute also seem to reject a view of ethnicity that is promoted in China: the “snowball theory,” which asserts that the Han emerged as a distinct ethnic group out of the Zhou, Qin, and Western Han dynasties.<sup>30</sup> According to this theory, the Han were originally a sort of metaphorical snowflake, which gained momentum and “through the assimilation of numerous ethnic groups... formed and eventually developed into the most populous nationality in the world,” or “an immense snowball.”<sup>31</sup> This theory takes a twist on perennialism by asserting that Han ethnicity was anciently present but that it could shift and assimilate other ethnicities.

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1991, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Mullaney, Thomas, “Introduction,” *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China’s Majority*, ed. Thomas Mullaney, James Liebold, Stephane Gros, and Eric Vanden Bussche (GAIA Books: London, 2012), 12.

<sup>31</sup> Xu Jieshun, “Understanding the Snowball Theory of the Han Nationality,” in *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China’s Majority*, ed. Thomas Mullaney, James Liebold, Stephane Gros, and Eric Vanden Bussche (GAIA Books: London, 2012), 113.

While he does not use the term himself, the historian Ping-Ti Ho supports the snowball theory by arguing that non-Han rulers would themselves become sinicized. Ho, representing the standard view of scholars in China but also an influential historian in the U.S. in the second half of the twentieth century, argues that the Qing ruling class underwent a drastic change after they began ruling over their mainly Han Chinese empire, and that this change was mostly present in the increasing sinicization of Chinese culture as well as Confucian principles and ideals for government. Ho argues that the core of the Qing dynasty's success was a "policy of systematic sinicization, with the implementation of the Ch'eng-Chu Neo-Confucian orthodoxy at its core."<sup>32</sup>

Ho recognizes that Chinese civilization changes over time, but that "there are certain elements of Chinese thinking and behavior that have an extremely long historical pedigree."<sup>33</sup> This argument clearly carries many similarities with a perennialist mindset, recognizing cultural continuity within changing governments and borders over time. Ho even goes so far as to state that these changes are "in part because contacts with the very people who become Sinicized also expand the content of what it can mean to be Chinese."<sup>34</sup> Unlike Zhao, Ho asserts that the majority of Chinese culture has been unchanging. The assertion that what it means to be Chinese can be changed based upon the people who become sinicized implies that an important characteristic of Chinese culture is in fact the ability of the culture to adapt and absorb other influences.

It is important to note that Ho represents a more current representation of Chinese thinking about ethnicity and national identity; earlier scholarship was even more extreme. Bo

---

<sup>32</sup> Ho, Ping-Ti, "In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski's 'Reenvisioning the Qing'", *Journal of Asian Studies* 57.1, 1998, 124.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 125

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Yang, a prominent Taiwanese scholar and activist argued in the early 1990s that Chinese identity was essentially primordial, arguing, “Chinese today are the direct descendants of the ancient Chinese.”<sup>35</sup> Unlike the Confucius Institute materials, however, Bo’s primordial argument asserts that the inability to adapt is a fatal flaw of Chinese culture and Bo lambasts Chinese culture in Taiwan, China, and in the diaspora.<sup>36</sup>

In an article in the Confucius Institute book *Common Knowledge About Chinese History* discussing the accomplishments of the three emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong, the sinicization of the Qing is painted in terms of simple adoption of Han culture and policies rather than an act of assimilation. In this article Kangxi is lauded for “appointing Han officials and promoting Han culture among the ruling Manchu class.”<sup>37</sup> What is crucial about this presentation is that it appears to be a one-way process of cultural adoption. No mention is made of the Manchus instituting changes to Han culture; rather, according to the documents, it was Manchu culture that was transformed by its contact with Han culture. At the same time, while the changes that did occur to the Han are not present in the historical textbooks I reviewed, the cultural textbook *Common Knowledge About Chinese Culture* acknowledges that, for example, the cheong-sam (or qipao) was originally Manchu and was adopted into what is now “traditional” Chinese culture.<sup>38</sup> In this article, however, the author goes on to say that this garment was successful largely because it already followed established principles about harmony.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Bo, Yang, *The Ugly Chinaman and the Crisis of Chinese Culture*, translated and edited by Don Cohn and Jing Qing, (NSW, Australasia: Allen & Unwin, 1992), accessed online at [http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic702814/Bo\\_Yang.html](http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/html/icb.topic702814/Bo_Yang.html).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Liu Zepeng, *Common Knowledge About Chinese History*, 168.

<sup>38</sup> Liu Zepeng, *Common Knowledge About Chinese Culture*, (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2007), 258.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

While the cultural materials of the Confucius Institutes support the idea of sinicization, the perennialist aspects of Ho's arguments are not clearly present. Instead of asserting Chinese civilizations change over time, the cultural materials seem to assert that China was essentially already a nation and that the change in ruling class did not seriously affect the fact of China's existence. The massive shifts and transitions in the governments of the different dynasties and the significance of these changes are severely underrepresented and is treated instead as a cyclical change to an enduring nation. *Chinese History* describes the Mongol, Kublai Khan's conquest of China by stating, "he moved south to attack the Southern Song Dynasty, which fell in 1279, and China was unified into one nation once again."<sup>40</sup> This assertion presumes that China was already a nation by the 1200s and that it maintained that nationhood regardless of what ethnicity the ruler had.

This primordial sense of nationalism emerges strongly in the online biographies of figures involved with overthrowing one empire or establishing the next. The transition from the Qin Empire to the Han Empire is a clear example of the ambiguous language surrounding the succession of dynasties. Liu Bang was a warrior in the Qin who overthrew the old dynasty and conquered their old territories to establish the Han dynasty. In Liu Bang's biography the overthrow of the Qin is mentioned only obliquely: "He was also granted the title 'King of the Han' following Qin's demise."<sup>41</sup> This makes it sound as though the throne had been passed from the Qin to the first Han emperor rather than being forcibly taken based on a series of massive revolts.<sup>42</sup> Notably, the language surrounding his reign mimics that of the Yellow Emperor. The

---

<sup>40</sup> Liu Zepeng, *Common Knowledge About Chinese History*, 138.

<sup>41</sup> "Liu Bang," Confucius Institute Online, accessed 3-1-16, <http://www.chinesecio.com/cms/en/culture/liu-bang-liu-bang>

<sup>42</sup> Hansen, Valerie, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (New York City: W.W. Norton, 2000), 113-117.

website asserts that “he has made a defining contribution to the unification of the Han Nationality, the strengthening of China and to the protection as well as the promotion of Han culture.”<sup>43</sup> Here, China is presented not as a cultural idea but as a nation. The Han are described as a nationality, and the article asserts Han identity was already present by the Han dynasty over 2000 years ago, and that the Han emperor was working to unify and strengthen rather than create.

The online and print cultural materials of the Confucius Institute present a vision of China with a national history of thousands of years but while these materials note that other ethnicities might rule China the history presented is undoubtedly Han. This can be seen in the association of historical figures like the Yellow Emperor and Liu Bang with the Han identity, while the ethnic identity of non-Han historical figures is presented ambiguously, the ethnic identity of Han historical figures is always clear. Nearly every single historical figure mentioned in the cultural materials was Han Chinese and that fact was prominent in the biography. It is often either included at the beginning of the article next to place of birth, or at the end of the article under a specific section of nationality.

In China, is not unusual to include the identification of someone’s ethnic identity with biographical information. It appears on book covers and hukou (native place registration) documents and is required for job applications. In the Confucius Institutes articles, however, it is almost always only the Han who are identified or included. Those few historical people who are non-Han simply lack the biographical information for their ethnicity leading to a distinct impression that the Han are primary, or that only Han identity is worth noting.

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

What is noteworthy about the presentation of the Han in particular in the cultural materials of the Confucius Institutes is that the Han is presented in a fairly monolithic way. With a couple of exceptions differences within the Han are largely ignored, and “Han culture” is often used in a way that implies a single perspective. In reality, as Thomas Mullaney argues, the Han “appears less like a coherent category of identity and more like an umbrella term encompassing a plurality of diverse cultures, languages, and ethnicities.”<sup>44</sup> This is significant because the Confucius Institutes do not represent all facets of the Han equally. By their very nature the Confucius Institutes primarily represent the Mandarin speaking populations of the Han as they instruct in Mandarin, providing Mandarin teaching and cultural materials. Thus the Confucius Institutes do not represent the seven other speech communities that are encompassed by the Han such as Wu, Yue, Xiang, Hakka, Gan, Southern Ming, and Northern Min.<sup>45</sup> Even as the Confucius Institutes recognize the diversity in languages within China their materials assert that, “the Chinese people had realized very early that a common language should be used in social intercourse” and assert that Mandarin should be that common language.<sup>46</sup>

The next issue was the difference in presentation of different ethnic groups. China officially has fifty-six ethnic nationalities, yet only a handful of these appear in the Confucius Institute’s print or online materials. In addition, most of the references are relegated to discussing different “folk” culture such as music or art. Of those, some nationalities are mentioned with much greater frequency than the others, such as Tibetan, while others are never or barely mentioned, such as the Manchu.

---

<sup>44</sup> Mullaney, Thomas, 2

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Liu Zepang, *Chinese Culture*, 281.

Often the mention of different ethnic groups is connected to a strengthening in relationships with the Han, or in contributions through collaboration with the Han. The most notable example is discussion of “The Potala Palace in Tibet.” The online article discussing the Potala Palace mentions on four separate occasions that it, along with the Jokhang Temple, are related to the Han, stating, for example, “It is Tibet’s oldest Han-Tibetan wooden structure,”<sup>47</sup> while in *Chinese History* one of the main mentions of Tibet is that a Tang dynasty princess contributed to the “friendship between the Han and Tibetan peoples” in the 600s.<sup>48</sup> The constant reminder of the connection to the Han ensures that the relationship between the civilizational achievement and the Han remains in the reader’s mind.

This perspective also presumes that the Han in areas like Tibet or Xinjiang can be thought of as essentially the same as the Han in the rest of China. Chris Vasantkumar challenges this assertion by arguing that it reflects “Cold-War era notions of an isomorphism between Han Culture and China.”<sup>49</sup> Vasantkumar argues that considering the Han as a monolithic group makes the Han who live in areas with high percentages of minorities nearly invisible in critical studies.<sup>50</sup>

As the presentation of Tibet in the Confucius Institute materials makes clear, the presentation of Chinese national identity as primordial is strongly linked with assertions of ethnicity, and the culture and history presented in the Confucius Institute cultural materials is

---

<sup>47</sup> “The Potala Palace in Tibet,” Confucius Institute Online, accessed 3-1-16, <http://www.chinesecio.com/cms/en/culture/potala-palace-tibet-xi-cang-bu-da-la-gong>

<sup>48</sup> Liu Zepang, *Chinese History*

<sup>49</sup> Vasantkumar, Chris, “Han at Minzu’s Edges: What Critical Han Studies Can Learn from China’s ‘Little Tibet,’” *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China’s Majority*, ed. Thomas Mullaney, James Liebold, Stephane Gros, and Eric Vanden Bussche (GAIA Books: London, 2012), 234.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 236.



undoubtedly Han-centric. In many cases, the focus on the Han in particular and Han culture is connected to assertions about China's claims to territories such as Tibet, Taiwan, and Xinjiang. The presentation of the Han in the cultural materials, particularly in the online materials and the *Common Knowledge About China* series, supports the assertions made by opponents of the Confucius Institutes that these institutes are an attempt to bolster soft power and the legitimacy of China's territorial claims that historical conquests under non-Han dynasties give China the rights to Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan.

In contrast to the primordialist views of the Confucius Institute's materials, a body of scholarship known as the New Qing History challenges many of the assumptions of scholars like Ping-ti Ho. Driven by greater access to Qing records written in Manchu, the New Qing History movement rebuts assertions of sinicization and argues that ethnicity is largely determined by internal affiliation. Evelyn Rawski, one of the early proponents of this view, argues that recent Chinese history has portrayed the Qing empire as an increasingly sinicized entity in order to promote a unified cultural and territorial history that lies "at the foundations of contemporary Chinese nationalism."<sup>51</sup> This has arisen particularly in the territorial debates around Xinjiang and Tibet and the legitimacy of China's claims to those territories as they were conquered under Manchu and Mongol dynasties rather than Han dynasties.

She argues that the idea that the Qing were sinicized fails to take into consideration a number of factors about the Manchu court. The first of these factors was the lack of understanding or emphasis of the court records of the Manchus. Rawski specifies that these documents represented "specialized channels" by which the Manchu ruling class was able to

---

<sup>51</sup> Rawski, "Reenvisioning the Qing: the Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History," *Journal of Asian Studies*, (1996): 831.

avoid interaction with their Han Chinese counterparts in order to enforce separate policies for separate ethnic groups.<sup>52</sup> This also signified a sharp difference between the status of Manchu court officials and their Han Chinese counterparts, with different policies being funneled through Manchu documents outside the awareness of the Han bureaucracy.

The second significant factor that Rawski argues for is the difference in administration between the different conquered groups of the Qing Empire. The emperor served different functions to different ethnic groups, and therefore incorporated different ideologies in framing their power and their interactions with various subjects. As Rawski describes, “The ideologies created by the Manchu leaders drew on Han and non-Han sources,”<sup>53</sup> and the Chinese emperor could also claim to be the “Great Khan” of the Mongols and the newest reincarnation of the Tibetan “cakravartin” kingship.<sup>54</sup>

Each of these relationships required a different set of interactions. This is most clearly seen with the cakravartin kingship, which was an “orthodox line of descent” which required that the next cakravartin have an association with the reincarnation of a long line of cakravartins, which implied Buddhist ideology. This differed significantly from the “hereditary orthodoxy” offered by Confucianism at the same time, and indicates the use of different ideologies when interacting with different groups.<sup>55</sup>

Rawski’s argument indicates that Qing identity was clearly and intentionally separated from the Han identity that would later be associated with the ethnic nationalism that would emerge at the end of the Qing dynasty. This not only rebuts the assertion that the Qing Empire

---

<sup>52</sup> Rawski, Evelyn, “Reenvisioning the Qing,” 833

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 834

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 834-835

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 835

was sinicized and that their success was in large part due to their successful sinicization, but also has greater implications for the validity of the assertions of ethnic nationalism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries by institutions like the Confucius Institutes.

Pamela Crossley, Helen Siu, and Donald Sutton argue that “sinicization- whether a good or bad way to summarize cultural change in eastern Eurasia- misses the central concern... about... ethnicity.”<sup>56</sup> They assert that the most significant portion of ethnicity is not about whether an ethnic group is externally distinguishable, but rather about internal association of a group with the larger outside community.<sup>57</sup> This implies that the significant aspect of ethnicity is not whether an outside group can claim a minority group because of shared cultural traits, but rather because the minority group itself identifies itself as a member of the larger one. The arguments brought up by Rawski as well as Crossley, Siu, and Sutton both cast doubt on the narrative provided by the Confucius Institutes and reflect some of the concerns about the Confucius Institutes as a dangerous assertion of soft power.

Modernist theories about nationalism, such as those of Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, also rebut the claims asserted by the Confucius Institutes. Modernism asserts that nations are relatively new and intentionally developed entities that do not have inherent cultural tendencies that might define them. Benedict Anderson argues that nations are “an imagined political community” that is both “limited and sovereign.”<sup>58</sup> In Anderson’s view, the way that people related to each other under a feudal lord as “indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship”<sup>59</sup> is

---

<sup>56</sup> Crossley, Pamela, Siu, Helen, and Sutton, Donald, “Introduction” in *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China*, edited by Pamela Crossley, Oakland: University of California Press, 2006, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*, New York: Verso, 1991, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

wildly different to how people relate to each other as modern citizens with “a deep, horizontal comradeship.”<sup>60</sup> This argument convincingly makes the claim that China under the mythical Yellow Emperor, or even under the historical Han Dynasty, was not a nation in the same way that China is today. In Anderson’s argument, dynastic China would qualify as a “dynastic realm” in that even if people shared a common culture they would still define themselves as feudal subjects of the emperor rather than equal citizens. At the same time, modernist scholars such as Ernest Gellner recognize that “some cultures have in the past inspired political action, but on the whole, this has been exceptional.”<sup>61</sup>

The presentation of Chinese national history in the Confucius Institute’s cultural materials seems clearly aimed at bolstering territorial claims. Perhaps the most blatant example of this is the way *Chinese History* discusses Taiwan. In the same article previously discussed that showed the Mongol Yuan dynasty as legitimate conquerors of a Chinese state, the author discusses how the Yuan established governance of Taiwan. Later, the book describes how the “Dutch colonialists started to seize Taiwan gradually by cheating,” and goes on to say that “the recovery of Taiwan was a great victory for the Chinese people.”<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the article blatantly and repeatedly emphasizes the historical claim China holds on Taiwan and presents the Yuan government (which is described as Chinese), as heroic and strong.

The use of history to boost political power is reflected in the recent rhetoric of Chinese government officials. Over the past few decades China has continually presented itself as a nation with 5000 years of contiguous history. President Xi Jinping himself has repeated the

---

<sup>60</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Gellner, Ernest, “Nationalism and Modernity.” *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2005), 43-44.

<sup>62</sup> Liu, *Chinese History*, 165.

phrase that China has seen a “civilization and development process of more than 5,000 years”<sup>63</sup> and linked it with the call for China to succeed and “stand more firmly and powerfully among all nations.”<sup>64</sup> There are clear advantages to this way of thinking: it allows China to take credit for the scientific and technological advances of people thousands of years ago, to stake a greater claim to the territories that its citizens inhabit, and to lend authenticity to grandiose expectations.

Policies of sinicization are not novel in recent Chinese history, nor are they specific to the Chinese Communist Party. This sinicization was most evident in the policy of the Kuomintang of “*Hanhua*,”<sup>65</sup> an official attempt “to assimilate ethnic minorities and frontier territories into an indivisible unitary Chinese nation-state.”<sup>66</sup> Sun Yat-sen even went so far as to argue that while there were more than ten million non-Han people in China, the Han population had “a common racial heredity, common religion, and common traditions and customs. It is one nationality,”<sup>67</sup> and that therefore the assimilation of the other minorities was inevitable, and that the Han represented the ethnic nationality of the new nation.

Chiang Kai-shek took this idea even further. While Sun Yat-sen had argued that the differences between the different ethnic groups were essentially moot, Chiang Kai-shek argued that these differences had once existed, but had been eliminated after the revolution. He stated, “since the 1911 Revolution, Manchus and Han have so fused into one entity that there is no trace of distinctiveness.”<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> “Full text: China’s new party chief Xi Jinping’s speech”, BBC Online, accessed 3-23-16, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-20338586>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction*, 172

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 172.

Although policies towards differing ethnic groups under the Chinese Communist Party initially contrasted sharply with those of the Guomindang, by the late 1950s and early 1960s Mao Zedong had backed away from warning the Han about “Han chauvinism.”<sup>69</sup> In an essay published in 1958, “National Minorities,” Mao highlighted the fact that questions of nationality were irrelevant, because what mattered was “whether they have communism and how much”<sup>70</sup> and warned, “we need our regions but not regionalism.”<sup>71</sup>

This shift in rhetoric from 1954 to 1958 seems to reflect the changing situations for the CCP in its autonomous regions, particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet. The period from the Hundred Flowers Movement in 1956 to the end of the Great Leap Forward in 1961 strained the relationship between the ethnic minorities and the Communist Party cadres, and tensions continued to rise throughout the Cultural Revolution. While the Cultural Revolution was a period of great turmoil for many in China, this was particularly true in Xinjiang and Tibet. In Xinjiang, representation of ethnic minorities within the party leadership fell dramatically, and members of the non-Han population were often branded as traitors.<sup>72</sup> In Tibet, worsening conditions for ordinary citizens, caused many families to subsist on a single meal each day through the Cultural Revolution and up until the 1980s.<sup>73</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising that Mao, who publicly supported

---

<sup>69</sup> Mao Zedong, “Criticize Han Chauvinism,” (1953).  
[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5\\_25.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_25.htm) 4-5-15.

<sup>70</sup> Mao Zedong, “National Minorities,” (1958),  
[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8\\_07.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-8/mswv8_07.htm) 4-5-15.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Millward, James, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 271-272.

<sup>73</sup> Tsering Shakya, “Blood in the Snows,” in *The Struggle for Tibet* (London: Verso, 2007), 107.

the Cultural Revolution, would amend his portrayal of the ethnic minorities and the problem of local nationalism to reflect the changing forces within Han-dominated China.

Upon the end of the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao, however, policy towards autonomous regions shifted once more. After decades of increasing state control towards Xinjiang and Tibet, the 1980s saw a new approach towards China's autonomous regions although with a continually complicated position on national identity. Perhaps most significant among these reforms was the establishment and reestablishment of comparatively liberal cadres in charge of the autonomous regions.

These reforms undoubtedly mark a swing towards autonomy and the official recognition of different ethnic groups as equals. This sentiment is clearly reflected in a talk given by Deng Xiaoping in 1987 to President Carter. Deng's talk makes explicit and repeated mention of the "genuine equality of the nationalities."<sup>74</sup> While this talk is a far cry from the "local-nationalisms" discussed by Mao, Deng still presented a complicated picture of Han nationalism. In the same talk, Deng asserted regarding autonomous regions like Tibet or Xinjiang, "the important thing is to see whether it has development potential. If the number of Han there is fairly large, and if they are helping the local people develop the economy, that's not a bad thing."<sup>75</sup> What Deng emphasized above all is the importance of the economy in the autonomous regions. They are assessed almost exclusively in economic terms, and Deng's terms are vague enough to imply that a great variety of Han presence within the autonomous regions would be acceptable. This in turn implies that what is most important is the advancement of China's economy as a whole, and that

---

<sup>74</sup> Deng Xiaoping, "China's Policy, Based on the Equality of Nationalities, is to Accelerate Development in Tibet," (1987), [http://archive.org/stream/SelectedWorksOfDengXiaopingVol.3/Deng03\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/SelectedWorksOfDengXiaopingVol.3/Deng03_djvu.txt) , 4-15-15.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

the agents to drive that change are Han. The shift towards a discussion of China's economy is also telling of the changes taking place under Deng's leadership, as the focus moves away from the party and towards the national economy.

The Potala Palace article mentioned above also indicates the validation of the turn towards the economy and the attempt to frame that shift in terms of the Han. This article directs attention towards Han involvement in autonomous regions rather than the regions themselves or the actions of the ethnic minorities living in those regions. In Deng's speech, the actions taken by the Han in this speech are the ones that advance the economy, much as Confucius Institute materials link civilizational achievements with Han involvement.

Ultimately, these policies expressed by Deng, while focusing on economic viability rather than political stability, are similar to those expressed by Chiang Kai-shek towards ethnic minorities. While Deng did not go so far as to argue that ethnic minorities had been "essentially fused" into Han culture, he made similar arguments about the autonomous regions themselves and their importance to China as a whole and as a unified nation. Deng's way of thinking and talking in the 1980s about China as a nation, its goals, and its ethnic groups appear very similar to those presented by the Confucius Institute today. As mentioned, the ability of the Confucius Institutes to promote and produce economic ties, particularly internationally, is also reflected in Deng's priorities in the 1980s.

The Confucius Institute's presentation of China as ancient and as primarily Han reflect not only primordialist views of China as a nation but also much of the rhetoric surrounding the primacy of the Han in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. What is absent from the Confucius Institute's materials are the challenges to that rhetoric raised by Mao and the CCP in the 1950s, while the presence of Han primacy in the Confucius Institute materials demonstrates the larger shift in the CCP back to



the older ideas about ethnicity raised by Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yat-sen. While it presents a linear and easy explanation of Chinese culture over the past few thousand years, the Confucius Institute's interpretation largely obscures the complicated interactions between different ethnic groups and the historical evolution of ideas about the nation-state and nationalism.

While the Confucius Institute's cultural materials seem unafraid to make assertions about China's territorial claims or the place of the Han in Chinese history, they largely avoid discussing the more recent political history of China and many of the more controversial topics associated with that history. By avoiding the discussion of controversial political topics that have emerged in the second half of the twentieth century the Confucius Institutes seek to bolster their territorial claims while simultaneously seeking legitimacy as a language instructing organization by avoiding current hot button issues.

It would be inaccurate, however, to describe the Confucius Institutes' cultural materials as apolitical. Aside from the fact that the presentation of history by the Confucius Institutes demonstrates a clear political agenda, the Confucius Institutes' choice to largely avoid controversial topics is, in and of itself a type of political statement; and second, the Confucius Institutes do comment on a few controversial topics. The cultural materials are therefore selectively political. Avoiding discussion about topics like Tiananmen and the Cultural Revolution fit the idea of the Confucius Institutes as an intentionally neutral "brand," even while bolstering claims to disputed territories. The issues that the Confucius Institutes choose to address are those that support gaining legitimacy abroad as well as establishing business connections.

A refrain that is often repeated in the articles surrounding the contemporary period is that the “people’s living standards have increased greatly.”<sup>76</sup> This reflects an argument made by Baogang Guo that the Chinese government uses economic success as a source of legitimacy, and that discussion of economic success taps into a strategy of legitimation that relies on popular consent and “benefitting the people.”<sup>77</sup> A desire for legitimacy can be seen not only in the presentation of living standards but also in the way that the Confucius Institute’s material constantly uses recognition from the outside world. In countless instances people, places, and traditions are presented not simply as interesting or significant in their own right but also because of the recognition from the outside world. The article about Beijing, for example, makes sure to note no less than three times that its tourist attractions have been recognized by UNESCO.<sup>78</sup>

The push for outside recognition as well as the relative silence surrounding the Maoist period that included the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution as well as issues like Tibetan independence or the government approved massacre of students in Tiananmen Square in 1989 supports James Paradise’s assertion China’s goal in presenting its rise and development peacefully is “reassur[ing] the world that its intentions are benign.”<sup>79</sup> The focus on the opening up of China shifts the focus of the cultural materials towards the perception of China as a modern nation engaged with the world.

In a similar vein, several articles mention figures that were involved in controversial periods of Chinese history while glossing over the more contentious information. The article on

---

<sup>76</sup> Liu, *Chinese History*, 256.

<sup>77</sup> Guo, Baogang, “Political Legitimacy and China’s Transition,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 8.1 (2003): 5-6.

<sup>78</sup> Liu Zepang, *Common Knowledge About Chinese Geography*, (Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2007), 119.

<sup>79</sup> James Paradise, “China and International Harmony: The Role of Confucius Institutes in Bolstering Beijing’s Soft Power,” *Asian Survey* 49.4 (2009): 647-648.

Peng Dehuai is a clear example of this trend. Peng Dehuai was a general and hero of the Korean War, and a prominent member of the CCP but was ousted by Mao in 1959 and was only rehabilitated under Deng Xiaoping decades later. His Confucius Institute biography, however, merely states that he was “a venerable proletarian revolutionist, military strategist and statesman, and was also one of the brilliant leaders of the Communist Party of China.”<sup>80</sup> This type of silencing is different from the complete omission of some controversial issues. Rather than avoiding discussion of the entire topic, the omission of significant parts of Peng Dehuai’s narrative gives the reader the impression that this is the totality of what is interesting about him. In this article the Confucius Institutes are actively reframing how Peng is shown rather than avoiding controversy.

This selective biography reflects a practice that has already been observed in the CCP’s domestic control of information. Peng’s treatment is an example of what David Shambaugh describes as “proactive propaganda,” in that it presents those parts of the story that the government believes should be transmitted.<sup>81</sup> Shambaugh describes this process as one that is seen positively by the CCP and framed more as “a proactive tool to be used in educating and shaping society.”<sup>82</sup> While Shambaugh uses the pejorative propaganda, his phrase “proactive propaganda” still carries some weight when discussing the Confucius Institutes because they are created for a particular audience.

In addition to maintaining silence or selective silence on some controversial issues, other articles demonstrate an overt attempt to control or change the type of narrative surrounding a

---

<sup>80</sup> “Peng Dehuai,” Confucius Institute Online, accessed 3-1-16, <http://www.chinesecio.com/cms/en/culture/peng-dehuai-peng-de-huai>.

<sup>81</sup> Shambaugh, David, “China’s Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes, and Efficacy,” *The China Journal* 57: 2007, 29

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

controversial topic. The most obvious example is the online article on Mao Zedong. Mao Zedong is certainly one of the most controversial figures in recent history and probably one of the most controversial in Chinese history. His leadership of the PRC both before and after the 1949 revolution had a great impact on the culture of modern and contemporary China. Mao has been revered as a revolutionary and reviled for his actions during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution and is so contentious that even the CCP generally refers to him as being “seventy percent correct and thirty percent wrong.”<sup>83</sup>

Rather than attempting to tackle the biography of Mao, however, the Confucius Institutes made the choice to instead present an allegorical story about him. The article tells a story about how Mao celebrated his birthday with a bodyguard in Russia. The bodyguard started drinking with Mao, but as “Mao Zedong was not good at drinking”<sup>84</sup> the Chairman proposed that he would eat capsicum (a type of pepper) for every drink the guard took. This is presented as a very generous offer by Mao, and Mao informs the guard that ““Today you can drink more and will not be punished for delaying work.””<sup>85</sup> While Mao is undoubtedly presented in a positive and distinctly merciful light, no other information about his personality, his background, or his accomplishments is mentioned. Mao’s article is the only biography that offers no biographical information to the reader. The story sidesteps the issue of how to present Mao in a historical context but still presents a value judgment about Mao and shows him favorably.

---

<sup>83</sup> Karl, Rebecca. *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 166.

<sup>84</sup> Mao Zedong Eating Capsicum to Compete in Drinking,” Confucius Institute Online, accessed 3-1-16, <http://www.chinesecio.com/cms/en/culture/mao-zedong-eating-capsicum-compete-drinking-mao-ze-dong-chi-la-zi-bi-he-jiu>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

Significantly, this article also avoids presenting Mao as a communist leader. Avoiding discussion about China's past association with communism is a recurring theme in all of the cultural materials I reviewed. While the Confucius Institute's cultural materials do discuss China's Communist Party and the struggle between the CCP and the Nationalists before and after World War II there is a period of almost thirty years between the revolution of 1949 and the opening of China in 1978 where the narrative is essentially silent. In *Chinese History*, this period is described in extremely vague terms, and what is highlighted is "the unity of all ethnic groups being strengthened within the country, China developed relations with foreign countries and resumed her legal status in the United Nations."<sup>86</sup> The materials do describe China as a "socialist" country, but these descriptions are sparing and the impression of China as a socialist nation is extremely muted. Instead, the materials focus far more on China's advancement since Deng Xiaoping's policy to open China.

The choice to avoid information about China's association with communism paired with the extreme push to view Chinese history in primordial terms demonstrates a larger shift in Chinese policy away from communism and towards ethnic nationalism in response to the rapid changes in the 1980s and 1990s. Zhao describes this period as a "crisis of face [which]... forced the communist state to construct a new national identity incorporating changes brought about by market-oriented economic reform."<sup>87</sup> The shift from communism to nationalism as a guiding national perspective is intimately linked to the Chinese Communist Party's desire for legitimacy, and a renewed focus on nationalism and particularly ethnic nationalism is a useful tool to strengthen "moral and utilitarian justifications, the two key components of political legitimacy."<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Liu, *Chinese History*, 249.

<sup>87</sup> Zhao, *A Nation-state by Construction*, 29.

<sup>88</sup> Guo, "Political Legitimacy and China's Transition," 20.

The presentation of Chinese history as primordial as seen in the cultural materials and the avoidance of more recent political topics demonstrate that the image Hanban is presenting is specifically tailored to an external audience and with particular goals in mind. The cultural materials demonstrate that Hanban is attempting to increase its legitimacy with an external audience as a modern nation rather than a communist one, and as a nation with deep historical claims to its disputed territories. The specificity with which the Confucius Institutes are targeting an external audience (especially with historical rhetoric that exceeds even Chinese perennialist theories) demonstrates that the Confucius Institute's cultural materials can be essentially thought of as propaganda. Much of what Hanban has produced shares problematic trends and supports some of the arguments made by opponents of the Confucius Institutes that these organizations are intentional exertions of Chinese soft power.

Recognizing that the cultural materials of the Confucius Institutes are problematic raises several other questions about what our response to the Confucius Institutes should be and whether these issues mean that there is no benefit to these organizations. What is most intriguing about the Confucius Institutes, however, is that the general debate surrounding them seems to paint the picture of two different types of institutions: one that intransigently supports the party line, and one that benignly allows for academic discussion and focuses on delivering language instruction. Examining the other factors that affect the Confucius Institutes, such as local differences and larger historical trends, demonstrates not only why the Confucius Institutes have been so successful but also how the issues with the Confucius Institutes can be mitigated.

### **3.0 CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES IN THE REAL WORLD**

When thinking about the impact of the promotional and cultural materials of the Confucius Institutes there are several factors that contribute to contextualizing their impact, particularly when making value judgments about the institutions as a whole. First is the fact that Confucius Institutes are far from monolithic. Institutes are located around the world and offer very different services, and their reliance on cultural materials is far from uniform. Next, the relationship between the Confucius Institutes' local directors and Hanban needs to be considered when thinking about the autonomy of individual Confucius Institutes. Finally, the differences in situation and structure that arise from larger trends of privatization in global education undoubtedly affect the impact that Confucius Institutes have on the education of university students.

Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms are now located on every continent except Antarctica and interact with educational organizations from elementary schools to graduate schools. Considering the diversity of the communities the Confucius Institutes serve, it is therefore unsurprising that one of their main tenets is “adapt to suit local conditions when teaching Chinese language and promoting culture in foreign primary schools, secondary schools, communities, and enterprises.”<sup>89</sup> This adaptation can be viewed in the variety of aspects that different Confucius Institutes focus on and in the communities that different Confucius Institutes serve.

The Confucius Institutes to some extent mimic older educational institutions founded by European countries, such as the Alliance Française of France, the Instituto Cervantes of Spain, the Goethe Institut of Germany, and the British Council of Great Britain. While these other institutes have been around for longer (in some cases more than a hundred years longer) than the Confucius Institutes, none of them can match the Confucius Institutes in the number of institutes abroad or in the number of countries with institutes.

Much of the success of these institutes can be attributed to the differences in structure between the Confucius Institutes and their European counterparts. While institutions such as the Instituto Cervantes are largely independent from organizations within their host countries, the Confucius Institute has adopted a different model. Each Confucius Institute is housed within a local partner university. By partnering with local universities, the Confucius Institutes save by

---

<sup>89</sup> Hanban, “About Confucius Institutes,” accessed 4-19-16, [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_10971.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm)



being housed within them and often are provided with funding -either in the form of housing or locally sponsored liaisons -by the local universities themselves.<sup>90</sup>

The partnership with local universities makes the focus of the Confucius Institutes different from that of many of the European national educational institutions. While other national educational institutions provide general community education, the Confucius Institutes focus specifically on higher education. The Confucius Institutes present themselves as fulfilling a service for these partner universities, namely providing funding and education about China and Chinese language. Particularly at the beginning of their proliferation, Confucius Institutes branded universities with a Confucius Institute as “members of an elite club.”<sup>91</sup>

While Confucius Institutes are designed primarily to promote Chinese language learning, many Confucius Institutes also focus on a particular aspect of Chinese culture. The Confucius Institute at the University of Bergen, for example, has a well-established wushu (martial arts) training program with three devoted instructors.<sup>92</sup> The wushu program seems just as well developed as the language courses, and it is not required that you take language classes in order to take the wushu classes. This means that these students may be entirely separated from the problematic cultural materials produced by Hanban.

Additionally, the Confucius Institute at the University of Bergen is an excellent example of the different members of the community that the Confucius Institutes affect. While the University of Bergen Confucius Institute has no advanced language class, they offer live and

---

<sup>90</sup> Stambach, Amy, *Education in Global Context: Confucius and Crisis in American Universities: Culture, Capital, and Diplomacy in U.S. Public Higher Education*, (Florence: Taylor and Francis), 13.

<sup>91</sup> Starr, Don, “Chinese Language Education in Europe: the Confucius Institutes,” *European Journal of Education*, The Confucius Institute System.

<sup>92</sup> Bergen Konfutse-Institutt, “Wushu i Norge” accessed 4-19-16, [http://www.konfutse.no/?document\\_id=26](http://www.konfutse.no/?document_id=26).

web classes to university students, non-traditional students, and high school students. They also offer classes to students all over Vestlandet, the larger region where Bergen is located. It is also interesting to note that the classes offered at the University of Bergen by the Confucius Institute do not officially use any of the textbooks produced by Hanban. Instead, the University of Bergen uses textbooks produced in Bergen, New York, London, and Hong Kong.<sup>93</sup> This indicates a clear separation from the Confucius Institute material which presents a problematic and primordial view of history.

Not all Confucius Institutes resemble the model at the University of Bergen. At the University of South Florida, for example, the Confucius Institute is the only provider of language and culture classes for those interested in China.<sup>94</sup> In this institution, therefore, the influence of the Confucius Institute on the education of university students would be greater than at a university with independent teaching. Amy Stambach explored the difference between universities with Chinese language and culture classes outside of the Confucius Institutes and universities that relied exclusively on Confucius Institutes for their China-related programming. Stambach analyzed three Confucius Institutes in public universities in the United States with different levels of independent teaching about China: a public university in a large town with a separate Chinese studies program, a public university in a small town with an established Chinese studies program, and a public university in a small town without an established Chinese studies program.<sup>95</sup> Stambach notes in her initial observations that while a university with a

---

<sup>93</sup> Universitet i Bergen, "Litteraturliste," accessed 4-19-16, <https://miside.uib.no/fs-cron/download/141929852/Kin102.pdf>

<sup>94</sup> University of Southern Florida, "USF Courses Offered," accessed 4-19-16, <http://global.usf.edu/confucius/courses.php>.

<sup>95</sup> Amy Stambach, *Confucius and Crisis in American Universities: Culture, Capital, and Diplomacy in U.S. Public Higher Education*, (London: Routledge, 2014), 8-9.

separate department to study China had indications that students could learn about ethnic minorities or discuss human rights abuses in China, but that those indications disappeared in the Confucius Institutes office, and that “gone are the titles and times of human rights courses or Dalai Lama events.”<sup>96</sup>

In some respects, this is a clear structural difficulty of the Confucius Institutes. While a Confucius Institute may have some overlapping functions with a Chinese or Asian Studies department in a university, it ultimately lacks the breadth of intellectual space for its students. The scope of the Confucius Institutes is to provide linguistic and cultural training, and while it may provide some funding for research beyond that scope, it does not seek to present a critical understanding of China in the same manner as a university might. For example, while you would normally expect a Chinese or Asian studies department to train its students about the history or government of China, the Confucius Institutes and their online materials largely avoid these topics. Beyond basic elements of history or government, as noted by both Marshall Sahlins and Stambach, and as can be seen in the Confucius Institute materials where controversial topics such as Tibet, Taiwan, or Tiananmen Square are largely avoided. The space to discuss all perspectives and facets of China, its history and its culture, are essential parts of an academic department but are not present within the Confucius Institutes.

Confucius Institutes that are linked to a university with preexisting strong Chinese language and culture differ significantly from the model at the University of Bergen and the University of South Florida. The University of Pittsburgh Confucius Institute, which has won the Confucius Institute of the Year award on multiple occasions, is a clear example.<sup>97</sup> Unlike at the

---

<sup>96</sup> Stambach, *Confucius and Crisis*, 12.

<sup>97</sup> Heryford, Michele, *2012 Annual Report*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Confucius Institute, 2012.

University of Bergen or the University of South Florida, the University of Pittsburgh Confucius Institute is completely separated from Chinese language instruction at the University of Pittsburgh. The University of Pittsburgh has its own East Asian Languages and Literatures department that conducts all of the language training for Pitt's undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty from various other departments, including the Asian Studies Center, provide the cultural courses. The problematic cultural materials produced by Hanban are therefore definitively separated from the University of Pittsburgh's students, and require the student to actively and independently seek out both the Confucius Institute on campus. Outside of the university, the University of Pittsburgh's Confucius Institute has created links with K-12 schools from Ohio and Pennsylvania to provide Chinese language education. Significantly, even at these schools the textbooks used are not necessarily those provided by Hanban.

The role of the director is an important indication of the structure of the Confucius Institutes, which has a significant role in their actual interaction with students. One of Hanban's basic requirements for a Director is that the candidate must be a long-term employee of the host university.<sup>98</sup> In other words, the Director is separated from Hanban and the Confucius Institutes. This is an indication of the autonomy of the director, and, crucially, it also creates space for a director to maintain the education standards of the host country or to acquiesce to Hanban.

The office of the director is perhaps the most significant in determining if a Confucius Institute will be a dangerous assertion of Chinese soft power or a valuable contribution and perspective in education about China. The director acts as the intermediary between the host university and Hanban, and therefore has a significant amount of sway. Stephen Hanson, a

---

<sup>98</sup> Hanban, "Guide for Confucius Institute Deans," accessed 4-19-16, [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_7877.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_7877.htm)

proponent of the Confucius Institutes and a former administrator at the William and Mary Confucius Institute, has argued that, “no one in China, or any other foreign country, can in the end tell us how to manage our universities.”<sup>99</sup> In his view, Confucius Institutes have simply not asked for local universities to violate their own educational standards.

Opponents of the Confucius Institutes, such as Perry Link, professor emeritus from Princeton, argue that the larger issue with the Confucius Institutes is that directors cannot be expected to remain entirely independent, and that they will subconsciously engage in self-censorship due to their position with Hanban.<sup>100</sup> As Link sees it, the real danger is that directors will be unable to regulate themselves, and additionally that the teachers from China who instruct for Confucius Institutes will self-censor to an even greater degree.<sup>101</sup> One of the great challenges of this assertion is that it is extremely difficult to measure, after all, if directors do not feel that they are self-censoring then they are unlikely to report or change their behavior. Link instead is referencing the possibility of a chilling effect on speech that might occur were the Confucius Institutes simply not present, and thus not a factor in thoughts of what topics to discuss on college campuses.

The lack of access to the Confucius Institute contracts is an issue that is often caught up in the assertion that the Confucius Institute directors and affiliated universities cannot remain truly independent if affiliated with a Confucius Institute.<sup>102</sup> Opponents of the Confucius Institutes assert that the secrecy behind the Confucius Institute contracts is an indication of

---

<sup>99</sup> Steven Hanson, Tuesday, July 1, 2014 (4:52 PM), comment on “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes PART II,” *China File*, July 1, 2014

<sup>100</sup> Link, Perry, Tuesday, June 24, 2014 (7:49 AM), comment on “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes,” *China File*, June 23, 2014.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Sahlins, “China U.”

something to hide. It is certainly true that these contracts are not readily available; they are not online, and I was unable to view the University of Pittsburgh contract. That being said, as some proponents of the Confucius Institutes who have been involved in directing local Confucius Institutes such as Stephen Hanson and Alan Kruver, argue, “all of our university contracts with overseas partners are public documents”<sup>103</sup> and therefore are available if the proper requests are filed. Even if the contracts are available through public record request, it seems clear that both sides could only benefit if the contracts were made more easily accessible to the public.

Some recent examples of misconduct seem to support Link’s argument. An oft-cited example of censorship within the Confucius Institutes was a scandal that erupted over the hiring practices of the Confucius Institutes at McMaster University. An instructor, Sonia Zhao, quit a job at the McMaster Confucius Institute because her contract with the Confucius Institute kept her from revealing her association with Falun Gong, a spiritual movement in China that is out of favor with the CCP.<sup>104</sup> Zhao also alleges that she was instructed in Beijing not to discuss sensitive topics with her students. This case is a clear indication of censorship of the Chinese citizens who become teachers in the Confucius Institutes, and is also a clear example of how problematic policies can be enforced even outside of the Confucius Institute materials provided by Hanban. The effect of the teachers selected by the Confucius Institutes, the types of scholarship funded by the Confucius Institutes, and the training given to teachers are all potentially problematic aspects of Hanban that need to be examined in further research.

---

<sup>103</sup> Hanson, Stephen, Tuesday, July 1, 2014 (4:52 PM), comment on “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes Part II,” *Chinafile*.

<sup>104</sup> Bradshaw, James, and Freeze, Colin, “McMaster closing Confucius Institute over hiring issues,” *The Globe and Mail*, Feb 7, 2013.

There are aspects of this case, however, that indicate the importance and control of local administrators. Crucially, the response of McMaster University when Zhao raised her concerns demonstrates the continuing independence of local partner institutions. After Zhao's contract surfaced, McMaster asked for specific assurances about hiring practices of potential teachers and when those assurances were not given McMaster cancelled its partnership with the Confucius Institutes.<sup>105</sup> McMaster's decision reiterates that local universities can insist on certain standards from the Confucius Institute, and if both parties are not satisfied then the local university can maintain its independence by rejecting the Confucius Institutes.

Additionally, this case demonstrates the need for clear communication and an equal partnership between Hanban and partner universities. Ultimately it must be expected that the Confucius Institutes as a representative of the PRC will attempt to maintain those interests, and what is crucial is that, recognizing that fact, local universities ensure that that voice is not the only one, and that they work with the Confucius Institutes to present information in a manner that is up to local standards. In an interview about the University of Chicago Confucius Institutes, Judith Farquhar, a proponent of the Confucius Institutes pointed out the partnership aspect of the Confucius Institute's presence at the University. Farquhar mentions that American representatives made staffing decisions for the Confucius Institute from "well-supervised professional language teachers from China, chosen from a Hanban list."<sup>106</sup> This insight into hiring practices demonstrates that it is a tradeoff between both parties in which the teachers selected must be acceptable to both parties.

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Redden, Elizabeth, "Confucius Controversies," *Inside Higher Ed*, July 24, 2014.

The crux of the issue is whether the practices of Hanban are bleeding over into the academic practices of host universities. On this issue, the contradictory anecdotal evidence demonstrates that there is not a singular answer to that question. Professors from across the country and the globe have made assertions about improper hiring practices,<sup>107</sup> shut downs of Tibet related events,<sup>108</sup> and elimination of controversial information.<sup>109</sup> Marshall Sahlins asserts that the nature of these “incidents” indicate that, “such incidents of academic malpractice are disturbingly common.”<sup>110</sup> On the other hand, there have been anecdotes from professors across the country and the globe that the Confucius Institutes have sponsored conferences where films not shown on the mainland were screened,<sup>111</sup> that they supported activities where Tiananmen Square was candidly discussed,<sup>112</sup> and that Confucius Institute staff welcomed discussion of dissidents in China.<sup>113</sup> The nature of these contradictory “incidents” seems to indicate that the reverse of Sahlins’ perspective may also be true.

The variability between different Confucius Institutes in terms of their local administrators, local academic community conducting work on China, and even the activism of its community seem the logical explanation for the variation between experiences in different

---

<sup>107</sup> Sahlins, Marshall, Wednesday, July 2, 2013 (9:04 PM), comment on “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes Part II,” *Chinafile*.

<sup>108</sup> Mecacci, Matteo, Tuesday, June 24, 2014 (11:23 PM), comment on “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes,” *Chinafile*.

<sup>109</sup> Hilton, Isabel, Tuesday, June 24 (9:42 AM), comment on “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes,” *Chinafile*.

<sup>110</sup> Sahlins, Marshall, Wednesday, July 2, 2013 (9:04 PM), comment on “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes Part II,” *Chinafile*.

<sup>111</sup> Gallagher, Mary, Wednesday, July 2, 2014 (10:34 AM), comment on “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes Part II,” *Chinafile*.

<sup>112</sup> Kruver, Alan, Monday, July 21, 2014 (4:46 PM), comment on “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes Part II,” *Chinafile*.

<sup>113</sup> Jeff Wasserstrom, Monday, June 23, 2014 (1:07 PM), comment on “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes,” *Chinafile*.



Confucius Institutes. The wild differences in experience with regard to Confucius Institutes highlights the absolute necessity for vigilant and open directing of local Confucius Institute branches with a firm commitment to high educational standards. It also reaffirms the necessity for independent university departments to discuss the topics that may not come up at the Confucius Institutes, or those topics which even vigilant directors might be self-censoring.

The differences between Confucius Institutes are exacerbated by structural differences within different universities. As Stambach's study demonstrates, Confucius Institutes are far less problematic when they are matched by a commitment by the home university to independently explore and study China and Chinese culture. The willingness to host Confucius Institutes on campuses without pre-existing Chinese studies departments can be explained by looking at the pressures exerted on universities by larger educational trends.

The American Association of University Professors indicated the presence of one of these trends, the privatization of the university, in its statement rejecting the Confucius Institutes in 2014, stating the Confucius Institutes represented "partnerships that sacrificed the integrity of the university and its academic staff."<sup>114</sup> The AAUP argued that universities have increasingly accepted input and financial support from corporations, foundations, donors, and even foreign governments, but that the Confucius Institutes cross the line by maintaining Hanban control within an American university. What is telling about this statement is that the AAUP, a fairly liberal organization, already took the involvement of private parties on university campuses as a given. This use of external funding generally is a larger problem that the Confucius Institutes have highlighted.

---

<sup>114</sup> American Association of University Professors, "On Partnerships with Foreign Governments: The Case of Confucius Institutes," accessed 4-19-16, <http://www.aaup.org/report/confucius-institutes>.

According to Matthew Sparke, higher education is being pulled in two overlapping yet contrasting directions, between “training the global entrepreneur” and “training the caring global citizen.”<sup>115</sup> Sparke defines “training the entrepreneur” as preparing students to succeed in a neoliberal society by focusing on “delivering global education and global benefits for a global community.”<sup>116</sup> Students and professors focus on creating global connections that will allow them to succeed in their careers after graduation. On the other hand, “training the caring global citizen” is a wildly different response to the same call for a “global community” that takes the responsibility beyond simply preparing students and encourages them to act as global citizens, using their education to critically examine neoliberal systems.<sup>117</sup> This push is associated with the humanities and the social sciences. Students focusing on their responsibilities as global citizens turn the career tools they have gained to a radical or revisionary view of the current system.

While these two perspectives have different ideal outcomes, there is a large amount of overlap between them. Both focus on language competency, study abroad experiences, and a broad knowledge of a variety of aspects of different cultures and global trends.<sup>118</sup> It is also important to keep in mind that many of these changes to education are in fact driven by the very fact that our world is becoming more globalized. Arif Dirlik points out that global changes often necessitate change in universities themselves in order to keep their students competitive not only with students at other national universities but also with students at institutions from around the world.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> Sparke, Matthew, *Introducing Globalization: Ties, Tensions, and Uneven Integration* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 413.

<sup>116</sup> Sparke, *Introducing Globalization*, 411.

<sup>117</sup> Sparke, *Introducing Globalization*, 412.

<sup>118</sup> Sparke, *Introducing Globalization*, 413.

<sup>119</sup> Dirlik, “Transnationalization of the University,” 60.

This comparison that Sparke points out within higher education is in many ways similar to the larger trends that Manfred Steger has noted in globalization itself. Steger argues that there are two main current trends within higher education that parallel those described by Sparke: justice globalism and market globalism. The proponents of market globalism believe that neoliberal capitalism has largely benefitted the world's population, making it more interconnected and increasingly democratic.<sup>120</sup> Under a market globalism model, students should be given skills to become more productive and to build connections around the globe to advance the market. Justice globalism, on the other hand, critiques and challenges market globalism and calls for a reform or a radical shift in globalization. Specifically, justice globalists posit that neoliberal capitalism is increasing class and state inequalities, and is unfairly harming the vast majority of the world's population.<sup>121</sup> A justice globalism education would train students to see and critique issues with the current system and to build connections internationally to change that system.

The conflict in recent higher education between training students to be “global citizens” or “global entrepreneurs” is a smaller example of a larger clash between two different ideas of what globalization should be and what possible benefits it can have. Sparke, too, places the establishment of these new ideas about the purpose of a global education with the rise of neoliberalism and the call for universities to move away from “the old ivory tower idea of the university” and towards an approach of preparing students for the global market.<sup>122</sup> This approach is seen as particularly necessary with the increasing privatization of education and, as

---

<sup>120</sup> Manfred Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 108.

<sup>121</sup> Steger, *Globalization*, 118.

<sup>122</sup> Starke, *Introducing Globalization*, 411.

Sparke describes it, “rapidly corporatizing” educational institutions.<sup>123</sup> Universities seeking to meet the needs of students and to provide services to train “global entrepreneurs,” therefore increasingly look to external sources of funding.

In this context, the conflict surrounding the Confucius Institutes, particularly at the University of Chicago, takes on additional meaning. The Confucius Institutes offer many of the skills that both global citizens and global entrepreneurs are looking for. Confucius Institutes and their funding offer opportunities for students to study abroad, gain foreign language skills, and to form connections that will benefit them as graduates and global entrepreneurs or global citizens. The push by universities to corporatize and find external funding creates a space in which the Confucius Institutes can succeed.

Stambach supports this argument most clearly by describing the Confucius Institutes as having a “triple helix” effect on universities. She argues that scholars must take into account a relationship between government, universities, and, significantly, industry.<sup>124</sup> What this means is that Universities and students are now required to “‘give back’ to the state and to work [with] industry.”<sup>125</sup> Universities are not only situated in a global context but are specifically required to integrate within the global economic and political system and the Confucius Institutes are a useful tool to that end.

A large difference between Confucius Institutes and other tools such as language departments or outside resources is perhaps most visible when exploring the ways that Confucius Institutes fund their programs. Each Confucius Institute is independently funded from Hanban, and thus the strain on the host university to provide funds for teachers or students is far less than

---

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Stambach, *Confucius and Crisis*, 16.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

a normal university department. Each of the Confucius Institutes hosted by universities examined by Stambach receive over \$100,000 a year to fund their programs and professors.<sup>126</sup> Additional funding is even available to bring visiting scholars from China to study, although the money and decisions come directly from the Chinese government.

This sets up a situation in which the Confucius Institutes “serve as stepping stones” for universities to form other connections, particularly economic connections, engaging in precisely the kind of connections that Starke mentions in his description of “global entrepreneurs.”<sup>127</sup> Stambach makes the connection that the Confucius Institutes are often associated with areas of potential economic growth, which indicates that while the Confucius Institutes offer skills that could be used by “global citizens” or “global entrepreneurs,” they are designed for the entrepreneur framework.

Additionally, Stambach describes how at many universities, Confucius Institutes serve as “temporary resources” to support the arts, social sciences, and humanities while they are in fact widening the gap between liberal arts and scientific or professional schools.<sup>128</sup> The use of external funding to provide support to fields within liberal arts divides them from key resources of universities that can then be used to focus more exclusively on professional or scientific efforts. This shift skews the liberal arts as a kind of non-necessary luxury, and refocuses universities away from them.

In this context, the Confucius Institutes simultaneously fill a crucial gap in funding for some aspects of the liberal arts in many universities, and undermine the significance of that research by focusing the appeal of the Confucius Institutes towards future “global

---

<sup>126</sup> Stambach, *Confucius and Crisis*, 13.

<sup>127</sup> Stambach, *Confucius and Crisis*, 118.

<sup>128</sup> Stambach, *Confucius and Crisis*, 118.

entrepreneurs.” Don Starr contextualizes this phenomenon by exploring the “branding” of Confucius Institutes. Starr argues that the Confucius Institutes were designed with a particular brand in mind that, “With regards to the operation of Confucian Institutes, brand name means quality; brand name means returns.”<sup>129</sup> The Confucius Institutes were meant to present a unified and consistent face to potential partners, one that related specifically to future financial returns. In particular, Starr quotes the Vice-Chair of the Confucius Institute headquarters, Chen Jinyu, who suggested particularly to potential partners that they ““include the Confucian Institutes into the regular administration of your institutions to provide key support and safeguard in funding, instructors and daily operation mechanism.””<sup>130</sup> This branding of the Confucius Institutes reflects fears expressed by Michael Hill that, “some universities will begin to use their CIs as a replacement for a regular language program... a strong temptation, given how little outside funding exists for the humanities.”<sup>131</sup>

Chen’s perspective demonstrates that the Confucius Institutes are not simply neutral tools in the educational debate that could support either a “global entrepreneur” or “global citizen” perspective on education. The idea of the Confucius Institutes as a brand demonstrates that the Confucius Institutes present a “global entrepreneur” organization that supports the establishment of economic connections and marketable skills. The very idea of selecting and promoting the Confucius Institutes as a brand reflects the position that education and particularly international education is something to be marketed.

---

<sup>129</sup> Starr, “Chinese Language Education in Europe,” *The Confucius Brand*.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>131</sup> Hill, Michael, Tuesday, July 1, 2014 (1:34 PM), comment on “The Debate Over Confucius Institutes Part II,” *Chinafile*.

Starr's idea of branding is supported by Dirlik, who argues that the Confucius Institutes represent a larger trend of "selling" culture and education.<sup>132</sup> Dirlik asserts that the Confucius Institutes appeal far more openly to universities as both cultural institutions and places of economic opportunity. He goes on to argue that the acceptance of Confucius Institutes into universities worldwide demonstrates the growing desire of universities to emphasize education on a political and economic level rather than a cultural one.<sup>133</sup>

Lionel Jensen argues "the placement of institutes within the centers, departments, and institutes of public and private universities is without precedent,"<sup>134</sup> but in reality the Confucius Institute is a part of a larger trend to involve outside corporations and organizations in university life. This situation is far from ideal, and the push towards commercializing higher education comes at the sacrifice of much valuable research that is not as easily quantifiable. The Confucius Institutes are perhaps the most polarizing example of the trend of privatization of education but they are not the first, nor will they be the last (see for example Chevron's University Partner's Program).<sup>135</sup>

Perhaps in an ideal world universities would commit to an elimination of private external funding and benefits, and work to maintain absolute academic independence by avoiding issues of external organizations altogether. In reality, however, this possibility seems remote. The situation that universities are now required to navigate is far more complex, and involves

---

<sup>132</sup> Dirlik, "Transnationalization of the University," 64

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Jensen, Lionel, "Culture Industry, Power, and the Spectacle of China's 'Confucius Institutes'" in *China in and beyond the Headlines*, eds. Timothy Weston and Lionel Jensen, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012, 282.

<sup>135</sup> Chevron, "University Partners Program," accessed 4-19-16, <https://www.chevron.com/corporate-responsibility/creating-prosperity/education/university-partnership>.

maintaining academic integrity while working with outside organizations. From the evidence that opponents and proponents present, different local Confucius Institutes are clearly affected to different degrees by Hanban's message. There are several factors, however, that seem to delineate how the institutes are run: first, a local director who is vigorously maintaining academic freedom; second, voices of independent scholarship from within the universities; and finally, independent funding for conferences, scholarships, and language learning that provide alternative voices on college campuses.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

As is the case with many discussions relating to China, the reality of the Confucius Institutes is an extremely complex, and must be analyzed carefully rather than judged quickly. This is particularly true because as Mobo Gao notes, "the Chinese government is not one person. It has different interest groups and it is changing all the time."<sup>136</sup> The fact of the matter is that

---

<sup>136</sup> Gao, Mobo, Thursday, July 3, 2014 (3:09 PM), comment on "The Debate Over Confucius Institutes Part II," *Chinafile*.



organizations as large and as varied as the Confucius Institutes are bound to produce differing individual institutes. What is crucial to focus on are the differences between the Confucius Institutes that are problematic and those that are providing valuable and often irreplaceable services for students across the country and around the world.

Analysis of the cultural materials of the Confucius Institute clearly demonstrates issues with the presentation of Chinese history as primordial, the overt presentation of Han identity and obfuscation of some other ethnic groups. The way they are tailored also makes it clear that the cultural materials are a form of propaganda, one that is explicitly designed with a foreign audience in mind. These materials are clearly problematic, and would be unacceptable as the only perspective on China.

It is also obvious that the Confucius Institutes represent Chinese soft power, or an organization expressly designed to raise the estimation and approval of China and its actions abroad. As Edward McCord asks, however, should the mere fact that they are an assertion of soft power be a cause for alarm?<sup>137</sup> McCord points out that the Confucius Institutes have been largely unsuccessful in drastically changing public opinion towards China. Additionally, the mere fact that the cultural materials are problematic does not necessarily mean that the Confucius Institutes are repugnant to academic integrity and freedom.

However the Confucius Institutes represent an often-irreplaceable tool for many universities and students who would otherwise be unable to learn Chinese or interact with Chinese culture. As scholars like Michael Hill make clear, at many universities the Confucius Institutes allow universities to offer far more coursework on or about China than would

---

<sup>137</sup> McCord, Edward. "Confucius Institutes: Hardly a Threat to Academic Freedoms" *The Diplomat*, 2014.

otherwise be possible.<sup>138</sup> As our academic system becomes increasingly corporatized the likelihood of the elimination of Confucius Institutes grows slimmer. While the Confucius Institutes may not be the ideal platform for students to learn about China it appears likely that unless universities, and educational organizations down to kindergartens are willing to increase their commitment to Chinese education by a drastic amount they may be the only platform or at least the most viable.

It is important to note that this does not mean the elimination of Hanban's perspective on controversial issues. Instead, part of the advantage of the Confucius Institutes is that they offer a different perspective than might normally be seen of China. That perspective, however, should not be the only voice. In order for that interaction and exchange to happen in a healthy manner, it is necessary that traditional educational institutions prepare their students and teachers to engage in that dialogue. The framework of the Confucius Institutes points out a larger issue within higher education internationally and particularly in the United States. As it becomes increasingly difficult for colleges and universities to fund consistent and critical Chinese studies departments, or to offer funding for professors to conduct research on China, institutions like the Confucius Institute have emerged to fill the gap. It is clear that the success of the Confucius Institutes as a "brand" derives at least in part from this gap in funding as it allows smaller schools that might otherwise be unable to offer such programs to their students to compete with other universities. To that end, it is crucial that international universities and American universities in particular invest in Political Science, History, Anthropology, and Chinese Studies departments within universities in order to promote better opportunities for students to learn about China in a holistic

---

<sup>138</sup> Hill, Michael, Tuesday, July 1, 2014, (1:34 PM), comment on "The Debate Over Confucius Institutes Part II," *Chinafile*.

manner. This requires that universities consider how to make their students “global citizens” in addition to “global entrepreneurs.”

The debate surrounding the Confucius Institute reveals two very different perceptions of what the Confucius Institutes are and what they are meant to do. On the one hand is an argument that Confucius Institutes are a generous opportunity for funding of Chinese language study and on the other is the perception of Confucius Institutes as a power play by an up and coming country. Both perceptions have their pitfalls. The first fails to take into account the complicated nature of modern Chinese identity and the importance of giving students the opportunity to evaluate China in context. The latter runs the risk of oversimplification, an unfair analysis of China in comparison to other, similar institutions, and the elimination of certain opportunities for students.

The major differences that appear between Confucius Institutes that seem to be benefiting the universities they serve as opposed to detracting from their academic independence are clearly present in the differences between individual Confucius Institute directors and their willingness to use Hanban produced materials, the amount of outside funding or commitment that the local university is willing to commit to the study of Chinese and of China, and whether the local university and the Confucius Institute seem to be acting as equal partners. When these considerations are met, it seems that the Confucius Institutes can serve as useful partners in expanding access to Chinese language and cultural studies.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

American Association of University Professors. "On Partnerships with Foreign Governments: The Case of Confucius Institutes." Accessed 4-19-16, <http://www.aaup.org/report/confucius-institutes>.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso, 1991. Print.

Barabantseva, Elena. "Change v. Order: Shijie meets Tianxia in China's Interactions with the World." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 34.2 (2009): 129-155.

Bergen Konfutse-Institutt. "Wushu I Norge." Accessed 4-19-16,

[http://www.konfutse.no/?document\\_id=26](http://www.konfutse.no/?document_id=26).

Bo, Yang. *The Ugly Chinaman and the Crisis of Chiense Culture*, translated and edited by Don Cohn and Jing Qing. NSW, Australisa: Allen & Unwin, 1992.

Bradshaw, James, and Freeze, Colin. "McMaster closing Confucius Institute over hiring Issues." *The Globe and Mail*, Feb 7, 2013.

Chevron, "University Partners Program," accessed 4-19-16, <https://www.chevron.com/corporate-responsibility/creating-prosperity/education/university-partnership>.

Confucius Institute Online. *Hanban*. [http://www.chinesecio.com/m/cio\\_wci](http://www.chinesecio.com/m/cio_wci)

Crossley, Pamela, editor. *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2006.

Deng Xiaoping. "China's Policy, Based on the Equality of Nationalities, is to Accelerate Development in Tibet," (1987). Accessed 4-15-15.  
[http://archive.org/stream/SelectedWorksOfDengXiaopingVol.3/Deng03\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/SelectedWorksOfDengXiaopingVol.3/Deng03_djvu.txt).

Dirlik, Arif. "Transnational and the University: The Perspective of Global Modernity." *Boundary 2* 39.3 (2012): 47-73.

Eckholm, Eric. "In China, Ancient History Kindles Modern Doubts." *New York Times*, Nov 10, 2000.

"Full text: China's new party chief Xi Jinping's speech." BBC Online, accessed 3-23-16,  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-20338586>.

Gellner, Ernest. "Nationalism and Modernity." *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2005.

Guo, Baogang. "Political Legitimacy and China's Transition." *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 8.1 (2003).

Hanban. "Guide for Confucius Institute Deans." Accessed 4-19-16.  
[http://english.hanban.org/node\\_7877.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_7877.htm).

Hansen, Valerie. *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600*. New York City: W.W. Norton, 2000.

Heryford, Michele. *2012 Annual Report*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Confucius Institute, 2012.

Ho, Ping-Ti. "In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski's 'Reenvisioning the Qing'", *Journal of Asian Studies* 57.1, 1998.

- Jensen, Lionel. "Culture Industry, Power, and the Spectacle of China's 'Confucius Institutes.'" In *China in and beyond the Headlines*, eds. Timothy Weston and Lionel Jensen. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012.
- Karl, Rebecca. *Mao Zedong and China in the Twentieth-Century World: A Concise History*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Leibold, James. *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese*. Basigstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Liu, Zepeng. *Common Knowledge About Chinese Culture*. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2007.
- Liu, Zepeng. *Common Knowledge About Chinese Geography*. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2007.
- Liu, Zepeng. *Common Knowledge About Chinese History*. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2007.
- Louie, Kam. "Confucius the Chameleon: Dubious Envoy for 'Brand China.'" *Boundary 2* 38.1 (2011): 77-100.
- Mao Zedong- Assorted papers and speeches. *Marxists.org*.
- McCord, Edward. "Confucius Institutes: Hardly a Threat to Academic Freedoms." *The Diplomat*, 2014.
- Millward, James. *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Mullaney, Thomas. "Introduction." In *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China's Majority*, ed. Thomas Mullaney, James Liebold, Stephane Gros, and Eric Vanden Bussche. GAIA Books: London, 2012.
- Nivison, David. "The Xia-Shang-Zhou Project: Two Approaches to Dating." *Journal of East Asian Archaeology*, 4 (2002).
- Orwell, George. "Notes on Nationalism." *Orwell*, accessed 4-20-16.  
[http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e\\_nat](http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/e_nat).
- Özkırımlı, Umut. *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*. New York: St. Martin's, 2000. Print.
- Paradise, James. "China and International Harmony: The Role of Confucius Institutes in Bolstering Soft Power." *Asian Survey* 49.4 (2009): 647-669.

- Rawski, Evelyn. "Reenvisioning the Qing: the Significance of the Qing Period in Chinese History." *Journal of Asian Studies*, 83.
- Redden, Elizabeth. "Confucius Controversies." *Inside Higher Ed*, July 24, 2014.
- Sahlins, Marshall, "China U." *The Nation*, Oct 29, 2013, 1.
- Sahlins, Marshall. "Confucius Institutes: Academic Malware." *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 12:46 (2014).
- Shambaugh, David. "China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes, and Efficacy." *The China Journal* 57: 2007.
- Sparke, Matthew. *Introducing Globalization: Ties, Tensions, and Uneven Integration*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- Stambach, Amy. *Confucius and Crisis in American Universities: Culture, Capital, and Diplomacy in U.S. Public Higher Education*. London: Routledge, 2014.
- Starr, Don. "Chinese Language Education in Europe: The Confucius Institutes." *European Journal of Education* 44.1 (2009):65-82.
- Steger, Manfred. *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Stryker, Sheldon and Burke, Peter. "The Past, Present and Future of an Identity Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63.4 (2000).
- "The Debate Over Confucius Institutes." *China File*. Accessed 3-14-16.
- "The Debate Over Confucius Institutes Part II." *China File*. Accessed 3-14-16.
- Tsering Shakya. "Blood in the Snows." In *The Struggle for Tibet*. London: Verso, 2007.
- Universitet i Bergen. "Litteraturliste." Accessed 4-19-16, <https://miside.uib.no/fs-cron/download/141929852/Kin102.pdf>.
- University of Chicago, "Statement on the Confucius Institute at the University of Chicago," September 25, 2014.
- University of Southern Florida. "USF Courses Offered." Accessed 4-19-16. <http://global.usf.edu/confucius/courses.php>.

Vasantkumar, Chris. "Han at Minzu's Edges: What Critical Han Studies Can Learn from China's 'Little Tibet,'" *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China's Majorityi*, ed. Thomas Mullaney, James Liebold, Stephane Gros, and Eric Vanden Bussche. GAIA Books: London, 2012.

Wu, Zhongwei. *Contemporary Chinese Textbook*. Beijing: Sinolingua, 2008.

Xu, Jieshun. "Understanding the Snowball Theory of the Han Nationality." In *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China's Majorityi*, ed. Thomas Mullaney, James Liebold, Stephane Gros, and Eric Vanden Bussche. GAIA Books: London, 2012.

Zhao, Suisheng. *A Nation-State by Construction: Dynamics of Modern Chinese Nationalism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

“文化的困境,在于不知不觉”*JieFang Weekend*, Sep 19, 2014.